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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002351

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/22/2019

TAGS: PREL PGOV KPAL SOCI JO

SUBJECT: JORDAN: KING'S INTERVIEW WITH HAARETZ DRAWS PRAISE AT HOME

REF: STATE 76108

Classified By: Ambassador R. S. Beecroft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: King Abdullah's October 6 interview with the Israeli Haaretz daily has drawn praise in Jordan. Public commentary focused on the substance of the King's remarks and, in particular, on his pointed call for Israel to stop unilateral actions in Jerusalem that threaten to destabilize Israel's relationship with Jordan and ignite the Islamic world. Jordanian officials indicated to Ambassador that the interview was meant to support the President's efforts and to show the Israeli government and people that Jordan and other Arab countries wanted peace and were willing to engage in positive steps if Israel showed similar constructive good will. While the King's comments largely focused on Jordanian priorities, the interview and its discussion of the Arab Peace Initiative nonetheless represent an honest effort to reach out directly to the Israeli people to explain Jordanian views. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On October 6 King Abdullah gave an interview in Amman to Haaretz writer Akiva Eldar. The interview, published in Israel on October 8, was reported on by the Jordan News Agency a day later and picked up in major dailies, followed by publication of a transcript on October 10. In the interview, the King said that:

--The current Israeli-Jordanian relation was a cold peace. "I don't think that is what Israelis want; I don't think that is what Jordanians want, and I don't think that is what the region needs."

--Israelis needed to decide whether they wanted their country to be a fortress in the region or a neighbor.

--The October anniversary of the 1994 Israeli-Jordanian Wadi Araba peace treaty "is a reminder that when there is commitment to respecting the rights of the other, when there is leadership with the courage to make difficult decisions in the interest of the people, peace can be achieved. But it is also a reminder of the missed opportunities for peace."

--The Arab Peace Initiative offered an "unprecedented opportunity to resolve the conflict and build a better future for all of us." He added, "The initiative is not just about the two-state solution. It is about a 57-state solution, 57 nations, a third of the world, that still do not have a relationship with Israel, will have normal relations with Israel within the context of a comprehensive peace."

--There needed to be a clear action plan to resolve the Middle East conflict. "That means engagement in serious negotiations that tackle all final status issues--border, refugees, settlements, Jerusalem--and build on the results of previous negotiations, within the framework of the already agreed terms of reference."

--Israeli actions in Jerusalem would directly destabilize Israel's relationship with Jordan and ignite the Islamic world, something that he had previously communicated to the U.S. Administration.

¶3. (U) Jordanian public commentary following the interview focused on the substance of the King's remarks (versus the fact that he had engaged with an Israeli publication):

--Former Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood member and political analyst Mohammed Abu Rumman wrote in Al-Ghad daily that the Arab public welcomed the King's remarks, which represented an escalation of Jordan's official rhetoric against Israel's expansion of settlements and the Judaization of Jerusalem. Rumman added that the remarks also broke the "stereotypical image that Arab media outlets and governments have worked to pin on Jordan, as though it is always following the U.S. government and providing support for Israel."

--Jordan's official Arabic-language daily, Al Rai, asserted that the King's comments "came at an appropriate time and a critical stage, which was simultaneous with the public rejection of, and anger at, the current Israeli policies and that requires sending a clear message to Israel, Israeli society, and the international community to urge them to go ahead with achieving a comprehensive and just peace for the Palestinians."

--Similarly, Al Rai published a roundup of reactions by Parliamentarians who hailed the King's comments as unprecedented and carrying political messages to Israeli society, such as telling them "you must choose between the

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ghetto mentality and peace."

--At an October 18 dinner with MPs hosted by Ambassador, interlocutors told Poloff that the King's remarks were much needed and perhaps overdue, adding that he had to address public concerns about Jerusalem head on. When asked about some public speculation that this might precede the withdrawing of Jordan's Ambassador to Tel Aviv, however, the MPs said that it was a bad idea. Instead, they indicated that they were hoping for a stepped up diplomatic offensive that would bring Israel to the table.

¶4. (C) Chief of the Royal Court Nasser Lozi and Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh told Ambassador that the King had offered Haaretz the interview to show the Israeli government and people that Jordan and other Arab states wanted peace and were prepared to take positive steps if Israel showed similar constructive good will. The FM also told the Ambassador that he had been planning to appear on Israeli television a few weeks before the King's interview but that the appearance had to be put on hold because of the announcement of new Israeli construction in Jerusalem. The FM is now looking for future opportunities to appear on Israeli television.

¶5. (C) Comment: The King did not mention specific positive steps that could be taken if Israel showed similar constructive good will, rather focusing on Israeli actions that are of concern to Jordanians. That said, the interview and its discussion of the Arab Peace Initiative represented an effort to reach out directly to the Israeli people to explain Jordanian views, in line with the July 17 op-ed published in the Washington Post by Bahrain's Crown Prince (reftel).

Beecroft